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12 May 1966

NRO review(s) completed.

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

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SUBJECT: Minutes of the Meeting of the 303 Committee, 11 May 1966

PRESENT: Mr. Rostow, Ambassador Johnson, Mr. Vance, and  
Admiral Raborn

Also present were General Maxwell D. Taylor,  
and Dr. Albert Wheelon

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OX CART

1. A wide ranging discussion took place on various aspects of dealing with the possible deployment of OXCART.

2. It became apparent that although the target breakdown for North Vietnam was well summarized statistically, a qualitative analysis of these targets had not been attempted. The acceptability of the fact that 11 targets would remain uncovered had also not been determined.

3. General Taylor felt that a statistical and qualitative analysis should also be done for the South China targets in order to obtain a more complete picture. General Taylor also made the point that we were addressing (in the proposed deployment of OXCART) the question of surprise attack by China rather than tactical improvements in the war in Vietnam.

4. Mr. Rostow raised the question of whether, if the decision were made to bomb POL in North Vietnam, this would have the corollary effect of raising our requirements for observation. Mr. Vance thought the answer was yes. General Taylor felt that the bombing of POL in North Vietnam was not a consideration in the deployment of OXCART.

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\*insert: but pointed out that you would have to weigh against that need the increased risk discussed in paragraph 5 of SNIE 10-2-66

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7. Ambassador Johnson raised the question: Why do we make the decision now if the recommendation is for a September deployment? Admiral Raborn underlined the fact that he had always stuck to the 30 day stretch as the safest time factor for a deployment. General Taylor raised the question: If we are going to make a covert deployment is there any other better time than right now? Will there ever be a more propitious time?

8. Ambassador Johnson made the point that the principals had not sufficiently addressed themselves to cover and contingency problems. The elaborate cover plans were to a certain extent self delusory. It was one thing for the pilot to have memorized a set story but quite another for the U.S. Government to know exactly how it felt and what it was going to say.

9. The Executive Secretary queried whether the camera complex now available was not far superior to that maintained in existing systems. The retort was, yes, there was a marked improvement in resolution in the OXCART system.

10. The Executive Secretary indicated a major factor in the deployment decision would be the negotiations with foreign governments for emergency landing rights. He particularly cited Japan with its traditional proprietary interest in Okinawa. Ambassador Johnson said this was a puzzler, and he wanted to think and discuss the Japanese aspects with his colleagues.

11. General Taylor reminded the principals that they should not forget to address themselves to the basic question: Is now the best time for deployment?

12. What then, in conclusion, did the meeting decide? First, there would be a qualitative judgment on the target question in regard to North Vietnam and a statistical and qualitative judgment on the target problem in South China, ~~under the aegis of the JCS~~. Second, the principals would do their homework on just what posture the USG would take (i.e. contingency statements) in regard to deployment of OXCART and its planned uses. Third, Ambassador Johnson would explore the problems surrounding deployment to Okinawa that might arise with Japan. When the aforementioned problems have been assessed, then the Committee would be in a better position to pose the entire problem to higher authority.

Distribution

Ambassador Johnson

Mr. Vance

Admiral Raborn

General Taylor

Dated: 12 May 1966

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